



Your Link to

by **TRACEY ERICKSON**, vice president, marketing,
Certified Angus Beef LLC



Angus, Angus everywhere

With a drive to town or a scan through television ad spots, you can see Angus beef promoted larger than life in fast-food chains, notably McDonalds, Burger King and Hardees. These grab-and-go giants have embraced the rising popularity of Angus: a great thing for the breed — or is it?

A quick search of food blogs online brings less-than-rave reviews for these burgers, and most comments include the pledge to never again buy the products. Big advertising budgets convinced some consumers to generalize enough to try something called “Angus.” Unfortunately, many of them subsequently make the leap to all Angus being less than desirable and not worth their hard-earned dollar.

Any Angus producer knows that not all Angus beef is the same. But consumers are not even sure what Angus means, and that makes it hard to explain the difference in Angus brands. You might start by noting Angus is a category, “a

specifically defined division in a system of classification,” according to the American Heritage Dictionary. The system in this scenario is beef branding.

Certified Angus Beef® (CAB®) is one of the brands within that category. Some brands have standards, some do not. Some brands have marbling requirements (the single most important factor in beef palatability), some do not. Some brands are found in the finest-quality restaurants and retailers throughout the world, some are not.

Change in approach

This confusion creates the need for CAB to move from a focus on “the Angus Difference” to “the Difference in Angus.” It may sound subtle, but it could be the most important branding challenge that CAB must address in coming years.

In 1978, when this brand started with a strong science-based foundation and specifications to ensure eating quality, it was the only game in town. In fact, the

CAB schedule that USDA graders use to evaluate carcasses for those standards is labeled G1, for the Government’s first such schedule. Since its inception, CAB has grown to firmly establish awareness for Angus, the category. Numerous brands exist today, some with standards certified by USDA and many others with standards validated only by the company producing them. Yet, only CAB has been proven to increase demand for Angus cattle. The lower-quality (especially Select and lower) “Angus” beef just drives demand for black-hided cattle.

The CAB opportunity is twofold. First, position Angus as the category that can deliver highest quality — no one wins when the breed is disparaged. Then, separate the brand from the sea of Angus products in today’s marketplace. Hence, “the Difference in Angus.”

Why is this important? Not separating the brand from the category unintentionally promotes all Angus as equal — an outcome the American Angus Association cannot afford. Its own brand, with a 96% market share of all the premium-Choice Angus programs, must break through the clutter to ensure consumers know the Difference in Angus.

Consumer focus

To better understand the consumer mindset on that topic, CAB recently embarked on a three-city qualitative research project. Focus groups of CAB’s target consumers were selected in each of three cities: Chicago, Ill.; Paramus, N.J.; and Denver, Colo. To qualify, the mix of primarily women along with at least two men per session, had to be 35 to 54 years old with household incomes of at least \$75,000, serve beef at least twice per week and purchase beef primarily at the meatcase in their grocery store.

Focus groups provide an important link to the consumer, reminding us to check on their opinions frequently. Many times they are quite different than our own. Consumers often want much less information than we want to impart. Most of them are looking to us to make their purchase decision simpler with easy-to-understand facts. (This differs from the “Natural” beef consumer who really is looking for more information on packaging and literature.)

The sessions started with a general discussion of Angus, the category. Findings showed that although all of the participants knew of Angus beef and most had purchased or at least tried Angus, no more than one respondent in each group actually knew what Angus was. Comments included: “I think it’s the brand;” “I’m not sure if it’s a breed, a cut or the way it’s fed;” “better;” “A higher-quality of beef;” “More pricey;” and “an upgrade.”

In the next line of discussion, on differentiating the CAB brand from Angus, numerous exclusivity statements were tested. The top ranking ones positioned CAB as a cut above USDA Prime, Choice and Select. The strategy only worked, however, with the additional clarifier, “Beef must pass 10 quality standards to earn the brand’s premium name.”

Among the various headlines tested, those rising to the top included the brand name as the medium that separated it from the category. Two that hit the mark: “Taste the Difference in the *Certified Angus Beef*® brand”; and “There’s Angus, Then there’s the *Certified Angus Beef*® brand.”

Additional questioning addressed consumer preferences for placement of live cattle in advertising. The resounding reply: no live cattle! Lastly, their preference for raw or cooked photos in promotions and ads found they overwhelmingly preferred to see cooked beef, except in store circulars where raw product is the norm.

This valuable information provides a great opportunity for the brand to stand out from the Angus category, while distancing itself from the fast-food perception of Angus. Top chefs already know the difference, but consumers need to be informed of their choices and of the vast quality differences.

The next steps will see CAB stand out in the field of Angus competitors with a new advertising campaign and messaging on target with what these focus groups told us. After all, they are the ones putting our brand in their cart and their money on the counter.

Fig. 1: No. of Angus programs certified by USDA

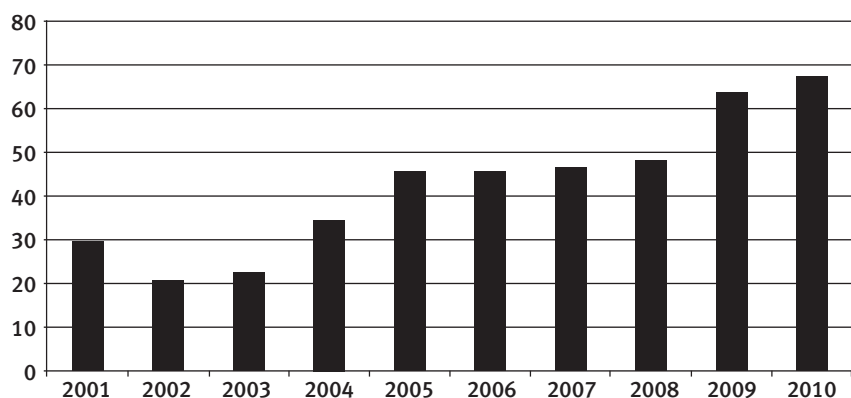
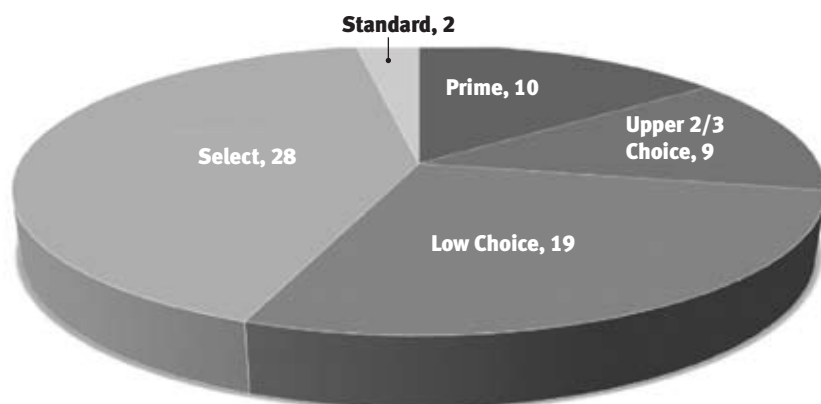


Fig. 2: Market share, %, of Angus programs certified by USDA in 2010, by marbling requirement



CAB STAFF CONTACTS

206 Riffel Rd., Wooster, OH 44691-8588; phone: 330-345-2333; fax: 330-345-0808;
www.cabpartners.com

John Stika, president
Brent Eichar, senior vice president
Tracey Erickson, vice president, marketing
Mark Polzer, vice president, business development
Larry Corah, vice president, supply development

SUPPLY DEVELOPMENT DIVISION

Kansas staff:
CAB Program Satellite Office
1107 Hylton Heights Rd.
Manhattan, KS 66502
phone: 785-539-0123; fax:
785-539-2883

Larry Corah, vice president
Gary Fike, beef cattle specialist
Wendy Nichols, office and data manager
Nebraska staff:
Paul Dykstra, beef cattle specialist
782 5th St., PO Box 856,
Chappell, NE 69129
308-874-2203

Miranda Reiman, assistant director, industry information
75845 Rd. 417, Cozad, NE
69130; 308-784-2294

Ohio staff:
Mark McCully, assistant vice president; supply development director
Marilyn Conley, administrative assistant
Laura Nelson, industry information specialist

INDUSTRY INFORMATION DIVISION

16360 Victory Rd., Onaga, KS
66521
phone: 785-889-4162
Steve Suther, director

To order CAB merchandise, visit www.angussalebarn.com.